

DESPAIR DENOUNCED AND GRACE GLORIFIED

NO. 1676

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Then He said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus says the Lord God; Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves.”
Ezekiel 37:11, 12, 13.

I HAVE read to you the vision of the resurrection of the dry bones. Keep it in your minds that you may understand the text. The figure is a very apt, instructive, and impressive one. It is not, however, a mere figure, it is a parable based upon a remarkable representation of the resurrection of the dead. Although the children of Israel at that time knew little enough concerning the resurrection, yet the Lord, the Holy Spirit, knew all about it, and He used it as a striking picture of the salvation of Israel from that national death which had come upon them. We may with equal accuracy, see in it a vivid representation of the work of grace upon the hearts of all those who are quickened into spiritual life by the power of divine grace. Men by nature are dead in sin till they hear the voice of God and feel the quickening breath of the Spirit, and are made to live according to that word, “He that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”

Such a metaphor as this before us drops with teaching as a honeycomb with honey, and it will be our own fault if we are not taught by it. The salvation of men by the grace and power of God is as great a wonder as the general resurrection. The putting of spiritual life into a natural man is a marvel of marvels, and should excite as much wonder as the raising of Lazarus, or of Jairus' daughter, or of the young man at the gates of Nain. Even the rising up of the dead at the last trumpet is not a greater prodigy than the bringing of dead hearts unto the life of God. I shall not, however, detain you by fuller observations upon spiritual resurrection, for I have work to do of another kind, upon which we will spend the bulk of our time and the whole of our energies.

If you thoughtfully consider the text, you will see that it divides itself thus, first, there is a *true word*—“Behold, they say, our bones are dried.” Secondly, there is in it, an ill word which goes beyond the truth—“Our hope is lost.” God is the sinner's hope, and He is not lost, so that the word of despair is not warranted. Thirdly, there is a *gracious word*, a word of mighty love—“Thus says the Lord God, Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves.”

I. Let us begin with that solemn confession which I have styled A TRUE WORD, “They say our bones are dried.” It matters not how badly men speak of themselves, for what they say of themselves is never worse than the truth. I have never heard of any sinner who too much depreciated his own righteousness. It is not possible to repent too much, or to have too lowly an estimate of one's deserving or of one's spiritual power. It is a grievous fault when mourners depreciate the power and fullness of God's grace and when despondency casts a doubt upon the possibility of their salvation. But while the depreciation is confined to themselves it is not possible to push it too far, or to exaggerate the evils of an unregenerate condition. The sinner's natural estate is as deplorable as words can describe. He is, in fact, much worse than he thinks he is, even when he is most bowed down under a sense of his guilt and danger. I believe that Luther was quite right when he said that if a man could see his own sin as it really is, he would lose his reason. The condition into which we have fallen by our transgressions is terrible to the last degree.

Observe, first, that *they describe themselves as dead, as dried and as divided*. They speak of themselves as dead, a man does not imagine his bones to be scattered about on the plain while he thinks himself to be alive. These people spoke of their bones, and therefore were conceived they were dead, and so the sinner may without exaggeration, conceive of himself as devoid of spiritual life. He knows not the life of God, for he is dead in trespasses and sins. The apostle speaks of the unregenerate as “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” And again we read, “They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that does good.” When men are corrupt, they have gone a stage beyond death, and are receiving the full harvest of sin. As it is written, “He that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.” Alas, sinner, you are as one that is dead, only your condition is far worse, for your responsibility and your guilt remain, and your death to righteousness is blameworthy, and will bring punishment upon you.

They were divided, too. These Israelites were scattered abroad in every place, and perhaps you, dear friend, feel that, as Hosea says, your heart is divided and you are found wanting. You cannot get your thoughts together, you cannot concentrate your affections, you are “as when one cuts and cleaves wood upon the earth,” a broken, shivered thing. You cannot rally your mind to confidence in God. Your mind is dead to that which is good, and your heart is divided by a thousand delusive devices.

Perhaps you go further with the figure, and seem to be dried, sapless, useless, and hopeless. A bone is dried when every particle of marrow is gone out of it, when it looks as if it never could have been covered with flesh, or have been part of a living body. Are you lamenting because you seem to be devoid of spiritual hunger, desire, or regret? Do you mourn that you cannot feel, cannot will, cannot repent, cannot love, cannot even fear? Do you groan because you cannot find in yourself anything which is good or looks that way? Do you ever groan out that mournful *miserere*—

*“Your saints are comforted, I know,
And love Your house of prayer!
I sometimes go where others go,
But find no comfort there.
I hear, but seem to hear in vain,
Insensible as steel;
If anything is felt, ‘tis only pain
To find I cannot feel.
My best desires are faint and few,
I gladly would strive for more!
But, when I cry, ‘My strength renew,’
Seem weaker than before.”*

Truly, you are as a dried bone that has long been bleaching in the sun, out of which all trace of life and feeling and power has departed. This is a very sad description of a man’s soul, and yet how many of us have had to subscribe to it for ourselves? It is just what we felt ourselves to be while we were without God and without hope, and yet the Spirit of God was convicting us of our guilt.

Further, these bones *could by no means raise themselves*. We never heard of such a thing as a dead man restoring himself to life, though he is but newly buried, if he is indeed dead, he cannot lift a hand towards his own reviving. These bones were without trace of life. The flesh was gone, devoured by kites and jackals, or rotted and scattered in impalpable powder to the four winds of heaven. How could these carcasses raise themselves? There was no trace of moisture left upon them. They could not give themselves life or motion, it were a fool’s hope to look for such a thing. Is that the dreary fact which forces itself upon you? Do not try to forget it. You are discovering the truth. You are already in a lost condition if you have not believed in Jesus Christ. You are not, as some vainly say, in a state of probation, your probation is over, and you are already condemned already because you have not believed on the Son of God. In you there is no spiritual power to stir towards God until His Spirit moves towards you. You will remain cast out in the open valley, unless God’s grace shall come to you and unless His Spirit shall put breath into you. For you to be saved will be as much out of the common course of nature as any other miracle, and in it you will have no finger so as to be able to boast, for the Lord alone must save you, or you are lost forever. It is a terrible word for a man to say, but it is the truth, and nothing more than the truth, that he is ruined by sin and “without strength” to repair the damage.

There seemed to be before these bones no prospect but the fire. When they that cleansed the valley came along and found these bones, they would gather them up as offensive objects and cast them into

the fire of Tophet to be consumed. This is the only lot that remains unto dry bones, and the same awaits those who are spiritually like they are. Has the Holy Spirit been dealing with any of you till you feel as if there were nothing for you but a certain judgment and fiery indignation? Do you begin to feel in your own conscience the first burning of the fire which never shall be quenched? Ah, whatever may be your gloomy apprehensions, they are none too gloomy. It is a fearful thing to have sinned. It is an awful thing to be called to judgment, and a more terrible thing still, to be under that judgment now, and only to be waiting until that sentence shall be carried out, "Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire." Oh, if you cannot sleep at night, and if all enjoyment of earthly comforts seems to be taken away from you, if you begin to sting yourself and make your own life wretched, I shall not wonder at it. It is amazing that a man can live and be quiet, and yet be under the wrath of God. It is a strange thing that he can walk this earth with a smile upon his face while yet his sin is unforgiven, and the sword of the Lord is furbished to work his destruction. Oh, that the sinner knew the jeopardy under which he lives, and the frail barrier that divides him from eternal misery. Does he not know that if his breathing should cease, he is gone to the place where hope is a stranger? I say, if a man mourns and sighs over his terrible future, so that a dreadful sound is in his ears, he only frets reasonably and his fears are based on solemn truth.

Moreover, these people felt that they were *cut off from healing agencies*. They say, "We are cut off for our parts." That is, each bone is cut off from its fellow, and the whole thing is cut off as to its parts from every hope and comfort. These banished Israelites were cut off from the land of Canaan, cut off from the Temple, cut off from the priesthood, cut off from the sacrifices, cut off from all hope of approaching God. Many poor souls have been made to feel as if they, too, were cut off. Their Sabbaths are no rest to them, the house of prayer brings no delight, and the preaching of the gospel yields no consolation. They turn to their Bibles, and every page seems to flash a threat, while no gentle shower of mercy drops from above. They fall on their knees, but even prayer seems to be a hollow mockery. They cannot pray as they would. They associate with godly friends, but they gain nothing by their fellowship. Go where they may, they think themselves like a dry bone which meets its fellow dry bone, and is none the nearer to eternal life for such dreary communion. The man is a nuisance to himself, and his very existence is weariness. Ah, you think, perhaps, I am describing an extreme case, but I know that I am picturing some whose eyes are looking upon me at this moment. Happy they who have been delivered from this wretched state, but I had almost said, happy they who are experiencing it, for those who feel their sinfulness are on the road to better things. Brothers and sisters, I hope your extremity will be God's opportunity. When your bones are dried, then will God come in as the resurrection and the life and make these dry bones live. When you appear to be beyond the possibility of mercy, then God, with whom all things are possible, will deal with you in a way of extraordinary grace and cause you to rejoice in His salvation.

It seemed to these poor people as if they were *quite given over*, for when bones are cast out in the field and left to be bleached by the wind and the sun, when nobody gives them burial, but there they lie, the refuse of the charnel house, then they are according to all likelihood, left for destruction. I have heard of persons who have felt in their spirit as if they were forever banished from the light, so that they have cried, "Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Is the throne of grace closed against the mourner? Will nothing avail? Will not cries and tears bring an answer?" By such downcast ones a whisper has been heard inwardly saying, "There is no mercy for you, you are cast out as reprobate silver." It is the whisper of Satan in the spirit, and it comes with piercing power. The devil often uses the conscience to be the hack on which he rides in his errands of torment. Yet there is a measure of truth in the insinuation. Apart from Christ, we are cast off, apart from Christ, God cannot look upon us except in anger, apart from the atoning blood, our sins protest against the entrance of mercy, and there we lie self-condemned and helpless, abandoned in our own judgment to swift and sure condemnation. Here, then, is language full of misery, and yet sadly true. We are sold under sin by nature, and led captive by the devil, driven by our iniquities to endless misery, from which ignorance and wickedness will not permit us to escape.

II. Now, I turn to that point upon which I desire to struggle with some of you this morning that you may be fetched up by the Spirit's power from the depths of despondency. Here is AN ILL WORD in the text, "Our hope is lost." It is a good thing if our false hopes are lost, but true hope is still to be had. Hope is not denied to any man, if he will believe in Jesus, he may yet be saved. They said of old in the Latin, *Dum spiro spero*, while I breathe I hope. And I turn the proverb over and say, *Dum spero spiro*—while I

hope, I breathe. To render the sentences rather freely will suit me well, “While I live, I hope, and while I hope, I live.” Sinner, your life lies in hope, and while you have hope you have life. To despair is an unwarrantable thing, a thing full of sin, and fraught with mischief, besides being false and unreasonable.

Despair, which is the mind’s declaration that there is no hope, is not so much a sickness of the understanding as a sin of the soul. It is a crime against the truth, a high offense against the Lord of love. God is, “the God of hope,” and those who are without hope are also without God. No mortal has a just pretense to perish in despair, and if he does so, despair is a form of suicide, a form of willful self-destruction. No man has a right to despair. No man can be right while he is despairing. Let me just speak about this and keep to the point.

Despair is a high insult to God. It casts dishonor upon His chief attributes. In the first place, it is most derogatory to the *truth* of God. If a man says, “I cannot be saved,” he contradicts the divine voice, “Look unto Me, and be you saved.” God has sent the gospel to men, and it is no other than good news to them, but despair virtually says it is no gospel, it is no good news. God has set up a throne of grace, and promises to meet there with the sinner, but this man claims that there is no throne of grace, for he denies that there can be any grace for him. He refuses to come to the loving Father because he feels sure that He will show no mercy, though He has declared that He will do so. God has given a thousand precious promises, such as this, “Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” The despairing sinner says he does not believe this, his sin is too scarlet to be made white, and the crimson of his guilt is too ingrained ever to be washed away. Thus he calls God’s promises lies, and this is a daring thing to do. “He that believes not God has made Him a liar because he believes not the record that God gave of His Son.” It would be an exceedingly heinous offense for me to stand up and say to the Great Physician, “You say, ‘I can heal you,’ but it is an empty boast, my wound is incurable. Great God, you say, ‘I can forgive you,’ but it is false, my sins are such as You can never pass by.” Mark, brethren, the Lord our God is very jealous of His truthfulness. His name is, “God that cannot lie,” and he that dares to say that He will break His promise has done Him sore despite. I need not surely show the infamy of this crime. Let your own hearts condemn the treasonable thought.

He that despairs insults God’s *power*. He does in effect tell the Lord that He pretends to a power which He does not possess. God says, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved,” the man says he will not trust in Christ, for he does not believe that God can save him, he declares that he has gone beyond the bounds of mercy, and so he tells the ever gracious One that He has no power to save him. The Lord loves not that His omnipotence should be thus denied. He is grieved with those who thus limit the Holy One of Israel. They that would restrain His power shut out one of the brightest beams of His glory.

But despair abundantly casts dishonor upon God’s *mercy*. Know you not that His mercy endures forever? “The Lord God merciful and gracious” is one of the ways of His manifestation. Has He not told us that He “delights in mercy”? Yet, if you say, “He will not have mercy upon me, I have out-sinned His grace. I have gone beyond all possibility of forgiveness,” you do as much as lies in your power, spit in the face of the God of love. Have you ever thought of this? Grieve to think that you have ever grieved Him in this fashion. This is the cruelest of sins, it aims its dagger at the heart of the Lord, and it pierces the Redeemer’s hands and feet. The Lord glories in His power to save, and He has plainly declared that He will save all those who confess their sins and put their trust in Him, and do we doubt Him? Dare we so derogate from the glory of the Most High as to say that there remains no hope of grace for us? Shame on such insulting falsehood!

Mark you while it does this, which is bad enough, *despair brings out the devil and crowns him in Christ’s stead*. Despair says to Satan, “You are victorious over the mercy of God. You have conquered Christ Himself.” Christ says that He is revealed that He may destroy the works of the devil, and you stand up and say, “Here are certain of the devil’s works which Jesus cannot destroy, namely, my sin and my sinful inclinations.” You wave the flag of the devil in the face of an insulted Savior, and whereas He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, you in fact tell Him that He has not half the power to save that Satan has to destroy, that Satan can be more successful in destruction than Christ can be effectual in saving. What? Have you again chosen Barabbas and given up Jesus? And is Barabbas in this case the fiend of hell? Will you believe him and not believe God? Can you assert that he, the father of lies, is more worthy of belief than the Christ who died that men might live? Yet despair

says as much as this, and says it in the most offensive manner. It prefers Beelzebub to Jesus, for it believes the lie of hell and rejects the word from heaven.

I go a little further, and I say, with a deep feeling of solemnity, that *this heinous sin of despair tramples on the blood of Christ*. Christ has died and shed His blood, and we know that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. We have God's word for it, yet here is a man who says, "It cannot cleanse me from my sin." If we look deep into the essence of actions we shall see that despair despises the atonement and denies its efficacy. We tell the man that there is forgiveness, but he mutters, "It is not for me." We tell him that Jesus Christ has emptied His veins to fill a sin-cleansing fountain, and he answers, "It may be true. He may be able to save all others, but not me." Now, what *you* have a right to say, other people may also say, and if all united with you, it would be tantamount to declaring that the crucifixion is an empty show, that the Redeemer's atonement is a mere pretense, and that Christ is powerless to save. You reduce the Savior to an impotent pretender, and can this be done with impunity? We preach in vain if this is so. We preach a Savior who cannot save, an atonement which cannot cleanse. Will not God deal with you for this, if you persist in this provocation? Perhaps you think it is very humble of you to talk so, but it is not, it is the height of arrogant impudence. Despair is highly insulting to the dear Redeemer, the glory of whose person is involved in His power to forgive. Remember, Judas who despaired was damned, while the men who crucified Christ were led by Peter's sermon to believe and live. Great sinners who believe shall find mercy, but far less offenders who despair shall find misery. God save you, then, from the Judas sin of despairing, and enable you to believe in Jesus Christ at once.

I must go a step further. *Despair has something in it of sinning against the Holy Spirit*, for the Holy Spirit brings you rich cordials in the promises of God, which will raise your spirits and will restore you from death, and what do you do with them? You take them and dash them against the wall, as if this almighty medicine devised by infinite wisdom, were the deceitful nostrum of a quack, and you could not receive it. It seems to me a great and horrible offense to deny the testimony of the Spirit of God, even of Him who gives to the Holy Scriptures inspiration and certainty, and this you do when you refuse to believe for eternal life. Jesus has put it before you Himself, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." How can you think that He will cast you out? The prophet cries, "Ho, everyone that thirsts, come you to the waters, and he that has no money, come buy wine and milk without money and without price." But Despair answers, "There is no wine and no milk for me," and it denies that grace is to be had without price. In the teeth of Scripture, it declares that there is no pardon, no mercy, no salvation, thus it denies the witness of the Spirit of God. Oh, take heed, despairing one, lest it be said to you, "You have not given the lie unto men, but unto God." It is a master sin, this sin of despair. God save you from it if you are in danger of falling into it, or if you are already its prisoner.

When a man gives way to despair, *there comes upon him usually a habit of wrangling against God and His truth*. Oh, see him at it. He is very low, and he comes to see the minister, and the minister's compassionate soul would comfort him in a moment if it was possible, and therefore he begins to talk to him about the gospel. "But," says the other, and he introduces a tough question which throws the gospel out of sight. "Oh," says the minister, "but God hears prayer." "No, no," says the man, and he begins quarrelling about prayer and its disagreement with divine decrees, and so forth. The man snarls like a dog, not to keep his bone, but as if he begged to have good food taken away from him. He does not want it. His soul abhors all manner of meat. The minister sets before him a precious promise which he thinks will certainly meet his case, but the perverse mind strives against it, and fights with the promise as if it were his direst enemy. It is not a promise that suits his case at all, there is a word in it which he does not understand, and off he goes on a tangent, beclouding the word, and eclipsing its light, so that he may, if possible, keep himself from being comforted. If God's people come and try to cheer him with their experience, he fights against their experience tooth and nail. It may be theirs, but it never can be his, there is something particular and peculiar about them why they should have mercy, and there is something equally particular and special about him as to why he should *not* have mercy. He has the key of the door of hope, and locks it on the inside, and then murmurs, "I am shut up and cannot come forth," whereas he fastens the door himself. Sometimes the despairing one gets into such a nasty, ugly temper against everything that comes to him from the Bible and from the ministers of God that you begin to think that he must be half mad. So, perhaps he is, but it is not a madness that saves him from responsibility, it is a madness which will be laid to his charge in the great day of account, because it is self-inflicted and will-

fully persisted in. Oh, what a wrangling, contentious spirit will despair breed, so contrary to receiving the kingdom of heaven as a little child!

Worse than this, *despair makes a man ready for any sin*, for there are many that say, “I can never go to heaven, therefore I will take a good swing here, and get what pleasure I can while it is within reach.” Have I not heard them say, if not in words yet in their actions—“There is no mercy for me, and I may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. I will go the whole hog, now I am at it. I will, at least, know the heights and depths of sin, as there is no chance of mercy for me”? Ah, and when Satan takes a man in another temper, he tells him that God will never forgive him, and the poor creature sits down in sullen rebellion, murmurs, thinks hard things of God, wishes he had never been born, and curses the day in which it was said that a man child had seen the light. Then he will be filled with blasphemous thoughts, and it may even come to pass that he rushes into self-destruction and takes a leap into sure perdition. How many have been driven by despair to the knife, and to the noose, or to a watery grave, I cannot tell! But this I know that if Satan can once fill a man’s mind with that, and make him say that God is not true, that the gospel is not true, or at least not true to him, then the enemy glories and cries, “I have him, body and soul. I can do anything with him now.” It was said of the Russian soldiers that they would not go to battle till they were drunk with raki, and certainly some men are champions for the devil when they are drugged by despair of pardon. Captain Past-Hope is a fierce leader of bandits, and will do and dare the blackest crimes. With all my might I cry to you—above all things shun despair, never say your hope is lost. There is salvation for you yet. God has not cast you away. Oh, do not cast away yourself. What are you doing? The Lord has not given you over to the tormentors, but you are writing your own sentence. You sit down and seem to think that you cannot be happy till you are thoroughly unhappy, and cannot be at rest till you are driven from all peace.

I must still plead with you over this matter. Let me say, further, *despair degrades a man*, degrades him *below the brute beast*, for brutes do not despair. See how an insect will struggle, even when it is cut in halve. Look at a poor bird, what hope it has even in its worst state of yet escaping the fowler’s net, still it flutters and does its best to get away. Will you despair where ants and wasps and birds still hope? Have you never seen a dog that had done something wrong, and has been beaten by its master? He tries to lick the hand that has beaten him, and he cannot be happy till he is forgiven. Poor creature, how it looks up for a smile! You have been chastened, you are smarting under it now, but you do not turn to God, nor seek His favor. You think worse of God than your dog thinks of you. Instead of crouching to His feet, as your poor dog does to you, to try and get a gracious word, you growl at the great Lord—“It is of no use for me to be humble: there is no hope.” You slander the Almighty, you malign the name of Jesus Christ, you deny the power of the Spirit of God, and so you degrade yourself below the beast that perishes.

Oh this despair—avoid it, I pray you, as you would avoid death itself, for *it will render all means of grace useless to you*. If you will not believe, neither shall you be established. If you fall into despair, the songs of Zion will be sorrowful ditties in your ears, and the preaching of the gospel might as well be the preaching of the law. See how a despairing man shuts his ears, like the deaf adder that will not hear, charm you ever so wisely, it matters not what the theme may be—if it is infinite mercy, free forgiveness, or everlasting love, yet as long as the soul is despairing, you do but make it the more wretched. The hopeless hearer rejects all consolation, his soul refuses to be comforted, and his despair embitters every morsel he eats and every drop he drinks.

Despair, too, is certainly vain and wicked, because *it has no Scripture whatever to support it*. “Oh,” you say, “but there are many dark Scriptures.” I know there are, but I have not time this morning to take them up one by one, and show that they need not lead any man to despair. But there is one text in the Bible which covers all texts, be they black as they may. I do not mind what the passages of Scripture are, nor what they testify, I am sure they speak the truth, and therefore I know they cannot speak contrary to other parts of divine revelation. Here is the famous text, “Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out.” If you come to Christ you cannot be cast out. “Oh, but there is a text—” I do not care about your text, you misunderstand your text, but there is no misunderstanding this one, “Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out.”

“Oh, but He will cast me out because—” Stop now, are you going to contradict my Lord Jesus Christ? I cannot have patience with you. You will greatly provoke the Father. “I will in no wise cast out,” that means, for no sort of reason, under no circumstances, under no possible conditions will Christ

ever cast out a man that comes to Him. “Oh, but do listen to me.” No, I shall not listen to you, and I wish you would not listen to yourself. You must listen to me as I repeat the Lord’s words—“Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out.” You are not to be listened to when you want to make out God to be false. Oh intolerable sin! Jesus says He will not cast you out. Again He cries, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Does Christ mean that, or not? Look the Crucified One in the face, look at His wounds, and after having looked at them, say, “I do not believe Him. Christ lies to me!” Will you dare say it? Can you thus defame Him? I tell you, there is nothing within the covers of this Book that ought to lead a man to have any doubt about the infinite mercy of God to him, provided he will just come and trust himself with Christ. There is no God at all if a soul that trusts in Jesus can be cast away, for the essential of Godhead is truth. I am an atheist if the God in whom I have believed casts away those that trust in His Son Jesus. He must be true, if every man is proven a liar. What do you say, then, to that blessed word, “Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out”?

Now, listen, you desponding one on the border of desperation! Have you never heard of *the freeness of God’s mercy*? Do you not know that everything that He bestows on sinners is given freely and graciously? The ground of God’s love is God’s love, and nothing in us. When He made His eternal choice, there was a remnant according to the election of grace. It is free grace that chooses for its love, and then loves for its choice. When Christ redeemed us, He did it freely—He freely delivered Himself up for us all. When He pardons sins, He is “exalted on high to give repentance,” and there is nothing freer than a gift—“to give repentance and remission of sins.” I tell you, man, the very spirit of the gospel is this, that there is no worthiness nor desert needed in you in order to your immediate forgiveness and acceptance with God. All you have to do is to admit to the truth that you have sinned and deprived yourself of all claim upon God, and then believe what God declares to you, that He is in Christ Jesus reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Do but accept this word of reconciliation, and you are a saved man as sure as you live. The moment you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the moment you trust your soul wholly and entirely in those dear hands that were pierced for you, you are a saved man. What right do you have to doubt that God can save you when everything is prepared and given of free grace? I tell you the Lord Jesus has saved many others like you. Are you a harlot? Did He not save the harlot, Rahab? Are you exceedingly wicked? You are not worse than Manasseh, who is said to have cut Isaiah in halves with a saw, and filled the streets of Jerusalem with blood, and yet the Lord saved him. I know that even though you are the worst that has ever lived, still you cannot outrun my Master’s wing-footed grace. Paul said he was the chief of sinners, but he obtained mercy to be a pattern to you. Why talk, then, of sullenly lying down in despair? You sigh—ah, if you mind not what you are doing, what you say in your despair will come true through your own making it so. If a man says, “I shall die, I shall die of starvation,” and there is a dish before him, but he will not eat, I am afraid that the probabilities are that he will die of starvation, and it will serve him right. If another person cries, “I shall die of thirst,” and there is a cup of drink before him and he will not put it to his mouth, I fear that he will die of thirst, and (I come to where I was before) he will die a suicide. He that refuses to eat and therefore dies is as much a suicide as if he stabbed himself in the heart. And he that will not believe God’s mercy, and will not accept it in Christ, is a soul-suicide as surely as if he plunged into debauchery, and gave himself up to every lust. Oh that God the Holy Spirit would overcome some of you this morning that have yielded to this great and grievous sin.

III. We shall now close by meditating upon the Lord’s promise, which we have styled A GRACIOUS WORD. I want you to notice this, poor troubled hearts; I want you to suck in this part of the text even if you forget all the rest. “Thus says the Lord God, Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves.”

Notice, *God meets us upon our own ground*, and takes us up where we are. They said, “We are as dried bones.” “Yes,” says God, “and I will quicken you.” But the Lord even goes beyond anything which they have felt or said, for they did not say they were buried. No, they were as bones scattered in the open valley, unburied, but the Lord knows they are worse than they think they are, and so He goes further in mercy than they thought they had gone in misery. He says, “I will open your graves,” and that looks as if they were finally laid in the sepulcher. But the Lord adds, “And cause you to come up out of your graves.” Listen, sinner, you have described yourself in a very distressing manner, but God accepts it as true, and deals with you as being such as you describe, or even worse. He regards men not only as

dead, but as entombed, in as hopeless a case as corpses pent up in the sepulcher, and forgotten as dead men out of mind. O the mercy of the Lord! There is no boundary to it.

Now, observe how *the word brings comfort by introducing another actor upon the scene*. You are like a dried bone, good for nothing, and able for nothing, but the Lord comes in Himself, and He says, “I will, I will.” Oh, that grand “I will!” “I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves.” “I will.” Now, listen. If God will save you, cannot you be saved? If it is all of grace from top to bottom, cannot you be saved? If there is no merit needed of you, no previous goodness to qualify you, cannot salvation come to you? If Christ died for the ungodly, cannot you have a share in His death, if He came into the world to save sinners, then why not you? If the gospel is not another shape of law requiring something of us, but if it is all free, free, free sovereign grace, why should not you have it as well as me? What should shut you out? If anything could have shut you out it could have shut me out, for I am just the same as you are by nature, yet I have obtained mercy, and why should not you? Come along and have it. It is freely given to all who seek it trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But remember that God comforts us here by depicting *the completeness of His working*. He does not merely say, “I will open your graves.” That is something, but if they are dead, what is the good of opening the graves? I have known careless ones drop into this place on a Sabbath as dead in sin as dead could be, and buried too. You never would have thought that they would listen to the gospel, but there has crept into their ear some such sweet word as this—“He that believes in Him is not condemned,” and they have said, “Dear me, how sweet it is. How precious that is.” Glory be to God, the grave has begun to open! But they felt they could not get hold of the Savior for themselves, and then the Lord has opened their hand and closed it on the promise, and when they get it they will never give it up, but they have cried, “He loved me, He loved me. I will risk my salvation on it, I will trust Him. I will trust no one else.” Thus the Holy Spirit has fetched them out of the grave though they were dry bones before. He will do the same with you. Oh that you may have grace to believe what God says here.

Lastly, notice *the feeling which is produced by it*. “And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves.” Ah, what a feeling a man has that there is a God when God has saved him, when he begins to dance for very joy of heart because he is fully forgiven, then he knows Jehovah is God. When his heart feels restful and full of peace, when he can say, “God is mine, Christ is mine, heaven is mine,” he does not need evidences of the existence of God, or arguments to prove the power of God. He carries a demonstration of the truth within his own heart, and tells of it to others with tearful eyes. “Oh,” he says, “there is no mistake about it. There is a merciful God, for I have obtained mercy. There is a refuge for sinners, for I have fled to it. There is pardon, for I have obtained it. There is rest, for I enjoy it. There is a heaven, for I begin to hear its bells ringing in my heart.” Then shall you know that God Jehovah is God indeed when He has opened your graves and brought you out. O God, bless this poor word to the troubled ones, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EZEKIEL 37:1-14, JOHN 5:24-29.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—42 (PART 1), 591, 612.**

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